

Sentence Fragments

A complete sentence has both a subject and verb, and it communicates a complete thought. Anytime a sentence is labeled a fragment, it's missing something - it's an incomplete sentence. Let's look at some examples and possible revisions.

Some fragments are missing subjects, so you need to add one.	
Fragment	Complete Sentence
Can't live without them. (<i>Who</i> can't live without them?)	I can't live without them.

Some fragments are missing a main verb, so you can add that.	
Fragment	Complete Sentence
The best kind of book. (What about the book? What is it? What does it do?)	The best kind of book inspires you.

Some fragments are dependent clauses that can't stand alone. (Sometimes the fix is easy, and you can just remove the subordinating conjunction. You can also add an independent clause before or after the dependent clause.)	
Fragment	Complete Sentences
Because it was a surprise. (We have a subject (it) and a verb (was), but the subordinating conjunction <i>because</i> makes this a dependent, or subordinate, clause. It can't stand alone as a sentence this way.)	Because It was a surprise. Because it was a surprise, we didn't talk about the party in front of my mom. We didn't tell my mom about the party because it was a surprise.

Some fragments are prepositional phrases or parenthetical expressions left to stand on their own. (Adding to the sentence is often required.)	
Fragment	Complete Sentence
With or without him. (This isn't a complete thought; it's just a prepositional phrase.)	I would go with or without him.
Especially the green ones. (This is a parenthetical expression – not necessary to the sentence – left to stand alone.)	Apples are my favorite, especially the green ones.

In a paper, a fragment can often be attached to a sentence before or after it.

Fragment in bold: Romeo and Juliet marry. **Without their parents' consent.** Juliet's nurse and Friar Laurence help.

Revision: Romeo and Juliet marry without their parents' consent. Juliet's nurse and Friar Laurence help.

Note: In journalistic or narrative writing, fragments are often used intentionally for emphasis. For academic and formal writing, it is best to avoid fragments.